



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates

OGGO • NUMBER 022 • 2nd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Thursday, May 14, 2009

—
Chair

Mr. Derek Lee

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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Derek Lee (Scarborough—Rouge River, Lib.)): I call the meeting to order. I see a quorum.

Our colleagues were reviewing the estimates today. Our clerk is still attending to some paperwork, but the clerk has distributed for your reference copies of the supplementary estimates (A) for 2009-10, which were introduced into the House only about an hour ago.

Our witnesses today are the Honourable John Baird, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. He has a number of officials with him from Infrastructure Canada. I see on the list Louis Ranger, John Forster, Carol Beal, and David Cluff. I will allow the minister to introduce the officials he thinks are appropriate.

I'm pretty sure, Minister, you'll have an opening statement. We apologize for the slight delay. The committees do get backed up here in this particular committee room.

We're ready to go, Minister. I'm sure you'll have an opening statement, and then we'll go to questions from members.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities): First, I want to thank you for having me at the committee. I was particularly heartened by the warm invitation to be here from my friend from Willowdale, and I am excited to be here.

Given that we're starting 10 minutes late and going until 12 o'clock, I'm prepared to step aside with my statement and go right into 15 minutes of questions, if the committee agrees, or we can go until 12:10, and I can go ahead with my speech. I'm in your hands, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: No. I think we'd like to hear, in your own style, a description of the government's stance on the movement of the.... I think the focus is on the movement of the infrastructure moneys out into the communities.

Hon. John Baird: Over the last hour or 40 minutes, everyone has been poring through the supplementary estimates (A), so I'll give my speech and we'll get on.

The Chair: Without prejudging members, the focus has been rule compliance, speed, and job creation, but members will decide what their real focus is when we get around to it.

The microphone is yours.

Hon. John Baird: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'm very pleased to be here to provide an update on the significant progress that the government has made in stimulating local economies, creating jobs, and helping support Canadian families.

Through our economic action plan, this government has made unprecedented investments in infrastructure from coast to coast to coast. Over the last few weeks we've made investments right across the country, from highway rehabilitation and public transit improvements in British Columbia to road and bridge reconstruction in Nova Scotia. Our government continues to work productively with the provinces, territories, and municipalities to get stimulus moneys to work as fast as possible.

Just 44 days into the 2009-10 fiscal year, our actions have already had a serious impact. In Ontario alone we have received 2,746 project proposals worth in excess of \$6 billion from 425 municipalities province-wide. These municipalities are ready to work, and we are proud to partner with them to get these projects under way. My colleague the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development recently announced \$2 billion for low-cost loans to municipalities for infrastructure-related projects. This will allow projects to get started faster and to have a greater effect on communities.

One of the most notable aspects of our government's economic action plan is the support that it's received across political lines. When we took our five-point infrastructure plan to the first ministers conference, it was unanimously endorsed by New Democratic, Liberal, and Conservative premiers. Since that time we've been working closely with Premiers Campbell, McGuinty, Doer, and Charest, just to name a few. Each has put aside partisanship to focus on helping Canada's economy recover from the most serious global recessions we've seen in generations. I should note too that the stimulus funding contained in budget 2009 as well as the important changes we've made to the Navigable Waters Protection Act received the support of Mr. Ignatieff and the Liberal Party, and they should be commended for that.

In the recent past, governments of different political stripes, Conservative and Liberal, have had trouble getting infrastructure money moving quickly. I think of programs like MRIF and CSIF, which under the previous government took two or three years or more to set up. I can also say frankly that this government is not satisfied with the layers of bureaucracy and agreements that have tied up infrastructure money under our lead either. So we've made a concerted effort to cut through red tape and speed up federal approvals, and I'm proud to report that we've made real and substantial progress. This work has been difficult, but it's essential if we're going to succeed in delivering the economic shot in the arm we need to deliver to the Canadian economy.

Like you, I'm eager to see the benefits that this funding will bring, but I know the results won't be apparent within the first month or two of the fiscal year. I was very pleased to see the comments of the leader of the Liberal Party, Michael Ignatieff. To his credit, he reached much the same conclusion when he said at the Liberal press conference at the Liberal convention that it doesn't make much sense to say we passed a budget in April, and it's the first of May; we have to deal with it for a little bit of time to see whether the measures we supported have in fact worked.

We will be reporting on our progress to Parliament in June. But a big part of the success of our approach will involve matching and multiplying money invested by our partners in other levels of government. By working with provinces, territories, and municipalities, we are able to invest three times more, go three times farther, three times faster. The huge response from municipalities, for example in the province of Ontario, shows that local governments are ready and able to act, and with the strong commitment of my premier, Dalton McGuinty, we will get the job done.

In addition, and as part of our balanced approach to stimulus, our government doubled the gas tax fund as of April 1 from \$1 billion to \$2 billion per year. We also moved the first payment up by three months so that the municipalities can put that money to work quickly. This is money that goes directly into the bank accounts of municipalities in every corner of the country.

Let me be clear. Discussions continue and agreements are being signed, ready-to-go projects are being identified, and applications are being processed. This action is ten times faster than anything in recent history. We are moving as aggressively and as quickly as possible. Officials in my department are working around the clock to speed up the process. Projects like the ones in British Columbia and Nova Scotia will make our nation and our communities safer, stronger, and healthier for decades to come. We need to act now in order to protect Canadians and generate the economic stimulus we need to see us through this recession.

By taking these measures outlined in our economic action plan, we can ensure that we will emerge from this recession faster than other countries and stronger than ever. With your help, we can continue this work.

I'd be pleased to take any questions, particularly from my friend the member for Willowdale.

• (1110)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We'll go right to questioning.

Ms. Hall Findlay, for eight minutes.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay (Willowdale, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, everybody, for being here, and you in particular, Minister, for giving us your time this morning. It's much appreciated.

We appreciate the effort at the non-partisan comments. And I will also in turn congratulate this government on increasing the gas tax fund, thanks to strong suggestions from us in opposition for quite a long time. So it's nice to know we're being heard in encouraging the right action on the part of government.

I will also say I recognize that I may, if I'm thorough in my job today, jeopardize an invitation to your birthday party, but I hope you will respect the need for us to do our jobs as parliamentarians. That's what we're here for.

Hon. John Baird: I have a great deal of respect for the member for Willowdale.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: But very specifically, we are here today to get as much detail in terms of facts and figures as possible. You've heard our concern—and in particular, in the last number of days there have been an awful lot of announcements, multiple announcements in many cases, a lot of language—but our real concern is that the number of projects that have actually been started is very small or nil.

Having worked many years ago in the construction industry, I know, now that we're well into May, that we've already missed a significant part of this year's construction season. So could you please tell us which projects and how many projects have actually now put shovels to ground?

• (1115)

Hon. John Baird: We'll be reporting back to Parliament in June. I think it's important we focus on the real federal role here, which is to work with the funding partners, identify priorities, and make announcements. After an announcement is made, the project proponents—in most cases municipalities, and in some cases provinces or other groups—can get going immediately.

We've seen good success in British Columbia, where a number of projects are under way, and in the province of Nova Scotia, where a number of projects are under way. There's a community centre in Huntsville that is getting going as well.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I actually just want to be clear, because there was a Building Canada Fund announced three years ago, and only 5% of that has actually been spent. But I'm specifically asking about shovels to ground with stimulus money that we approved in the budget. So I don't mean old projects, and I understand the desire and there's more talk of announcements, but the question was very specific. Can you tell me what projects, using the new stimulus money, have actually started construction?

Hon. John Baird: There are a number that have, and we'll be reporting back in June on that.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: But it's now May and I'm asking the question now. Surely you have some, or perhaps you don't. If you have projects....

We approved this budget, despite its flaws, to ensure money for stimulus started to flow. That was the whole reason for doing that. Can you please tell me about projects that in fact are using this stimulus money that was approved and that at this time—the middle of May, already well into the construction season—have shovels already breaking ground?

Hon. John Baird: I do agree with Mr. Ignatieff when he said very strongly in Vancouver—and I think he was wise in this respect—that it wouldn't make much sense to be passing judgment in May on a plan that was just started in April. It will snowball.

To give you a few examples, I can tell you about Highway 97, Stormy Road North, in the province of British Columbia; the construction has already begun there. I can tell about Highway 77 from Deasum Creek to the Northwest Territories border; the tender is being released shortly and the contractors are already being hired.

The good news is that things are happening. There are projects that are going. That will snowball every day, every week, every month, and we'll be reporting back to Parliament in June, as Parliament requested, and I think that's a good idea.

There's no doubt that when you work with partners you have to conclude agreements, and we've done it 10 times faster than it was ever done before. I'm confident you'll see a rather sharp curve every day, every week, and every month as we go forward. The specifics on what are thousands of different projects will be coming.

You raised a concern and a problem with the Building Canada Fund, and I'm going to agree with you. Both MRIF and CSIF, done by the Martin government, and the Building Canada Fund by our government took an inordinate amount of time to develop agreements with the provinces and then to identify projects. I think concerns and criticisms in some respects are fair. We've moved 10 times faster in working with the provinces and municipalities. And in the absence of just going it alone or just giving money to the municipalities, we'll be able to create three times as many—

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I'm really sorry to interrupt, Mr. Minister, but to say “we will” and that we're dealing with speed.... You have given me two small examples in British Columbia. I still am not clear on whether that's from stimulus funding—

Hon. John Baird: It is.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: —or whether that's from BCF funding that was already announced.

Hon. John Baird: It is stimulus funding.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: You've referred to 2,700 project applications, but we are in the middle of May. I will repeat that to say that “we will”, to have forward-looking projections, does not answer my question. This money was approved, with some reservations, but it was approved by the opposition specifically so we would get stimulus money out the door. This budget was approved months ago. It was being drafted well before that. It is now the middle of May.

You yourself have admitted that when you have an application, it will take time to establish partners. We have expressed real concerns about the matching requirements for municipalities, because we know—and hopefully we'll talk a bit more about that—that it has held up an awful lot. But the key here is that this money simply has not flowed and we are not seeing shovels in the ground.

Announcements do not pay wages. The purpose of the approval of the stimulus money was to get people back to work. And you have simply not given me examples of this. I don't want forward-looking projections. I want to know what your government has actually accomplished.

• (1120)

Hon. John Baird: But the good news is that announcements actually do. When we make an announcement, the project proponent has the green light to move forward immediately to get shovels in the ground. They can immediately hire people. They can immediately move forward, whether it's engineers, architects—

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Would that be like the Edmonton light rail announcement, which has now been re-announced, and yet the project still doesn't have approval?

Hon. John Baird: Which project is this?

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: It is the Edmonton light rail.

The problem is that we keep getting announcements. We have situations where we've had projects announced two, three, and even four times. Announcements do not pay wages. My question was whether cheques have been written.

Hon. John Baird: But I'm going to—

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: And what shovels have been put in the ground?

Hon. John Baird: In fairness, announcements can pay wages, because once an announcement is made, the municipality can hire people immediately. They do not require any further approval to begin the work.

The way Building Canada and the Liberal programs operated is that you gave invoices and invoice statements, which would be remunerated. The way the infrastructure funds under the stimulus, the \$4 billion fund, can work is that we can upfront 25% of the money for that year immediately, once there's been an announcement, so that municipalities can go forward.

I'm going to challenge you. If you could name me a single municipality that can't move forward on a project we've announced because they don't have money, where work can't be done, if you have a single municipality, I will correct it today.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: But it's a question of timing. It's a question of the fact that we're in the middle of May, and we still don't have shovels in the ground. The whole purpose of this was to take advantage of this construction season.

It's all well and good that these announcements may go ahead next year, but the purpose was this year and stimulus now.

Hon. John Baird: When we came forward with the plan to partner with provinces and municipalities, I think there were some legitimate concerns, which you and the Liberal party expressed, that municipalities wouldn't have the money to participate and that many or most would be left out. The good news is that we did a bid call in Ontario. There were 2,700 projects, and 95% of municipalities said that they had a project and had their third of the funding to go forward. So those concerns have not materialized. That's good news.

I'll give you an example. In the first two or three days of April, we advanced municipalities double the gas tax money, but we also advanced the payment up from July. I suspect that you won't notice any difference in municipalities as compared to the federal performance with respect to stimulation—you know, jobs. It does take a few weeks.

It was Mr. Ignatieff who I think wisely said, and I would impart it to you, that we cannot pass judgment in May on a plan that went forward in May. I encourage you to reflect on that, because I think he's a very wise man in this regard.

The Chair: That's your time.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. John Baird: My premier and I are working well together too. He has done a good job too, and I'm sure you have good things to say about that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We'll have Madame Bourgeois, for eight minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, minister, and thank you for being here this morning. Good morning to you as well, ladies and gentlemen.

When you appeared before this committee, my colleague, who handles infrastructure for Quebec, asked you how the Canada-Quebec agreement would be done. He knows that it's different in Quebec. You have to reach an agreement with the Quebec government, and then the municipalities have to reach one with the province. Is that done?

Hon. John Baird: The premier of Quebec and the Prime Minister of Canada have announced a contribution of \$350 million to PRECO, the Programme de renouvellement des conduites d'eau potable et d'eaux usées, the purpose of which is to support projects in every Quebec region. I am proud to say that a number of projects have already been identified and that some are on the table. We're making progress. I wasn't satisfied. We have to do more and more quickly. As I've previously told our colleague Mario Laframboise, we respect the jurisdictions of the provinces. We had to negotiate with the Government of Quebec to reach an agreement on the list of projects that the two levels of government will support.

Yesterday I spoke for about half an hour with Minister Nathalie Normandeau and members of the Quebec government. It was a good discussion. I hope there will be more specific projects in the coming days and weeks. The Prime Minister of Canada has discussed our progress with the Union des municipalités du Québec this afternoon. I realize we must do more in the coming days and weeks. The process has taken a little more time in Quebec as a result of the legislation and because we have to cooperate with the Government of Quebec.

• (1125)

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I suppose the \$350 million you refer to is part of the stimulus package.

Hon. John Baird: It's the stimulus.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: It's the stimulus.

Hon. John Baird: Of the \$4 billion, slightly less than \$1 billion will go to Quebec. If the provinces and municipalities invested \$2 billion or \$3 billion, we could have \$7 billion and create two or three times more projects in the municipalities.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: As the municipalities couldn't do business directly with you, but had to go through the Government of Quebec, we wondered whether as many projects would be accepted from Quebec as from the other provinces, given the time. In your view, will there be as many projects for Quebec?

Hon. John Baird: Of course. There's \$350 million, which represents one-third of the billion dollars allocated to Quebec under this specific program. There are other projects that do not come under the Quebec government's jurisdiction, such as ports. There is a proposal from Sept-Îles and Quebec City, and other projects are proposed by the Port of Montreal. There are also others in British Columbia, such as the Port of Nanaimo; in Ontario, there's the port of Hamilton. There may also be a little money spent on projects under federal jurisdiction.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Ultimately, you're assuring me that it isn't because municipalities have to go through the Government of Quebec that they will have fewer projects accepted. You've taken that aspect into account.

Hon. John Baird: Yes, of course.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: This morning's *Le Devoir* talks about the annual meeting of the Union des municipalités du Québec, which began yesterday in Gatineau. The mayors of the municipalities are complaining that there still haven't been any major site start-ups as a result of the emergency infrastructure funding promised to stimulate the economy.

Stephen Harper and Jean Charest will be meeting with them this afternoon. What do you have to say to that?

Hon. John Baird: The Prime Minister and I will be going to Gatineau this afternoon. We'll be reporting on our progress in the House of Commons and the Senate in June. This file is a major concern for me. We've had to make a lot of decisions with the Government of Quebec. The June report will provide specific details on our commitments and work. We agree that we have made progress here.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: May my colleague ask a question, Mr. Chairman? Does he have any time left?

The Chair: You have two minutes left.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, I want to ask you a very specific question. A very special case was raised in the House last week, but I don't want you to respond to me on that specific case; it's merely an example.

Last week, a question was asked in the House on the Port of Rimouski, and the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans answered. The Port of Rimouski also belongs to Transport Canada; it's a shared port. For years now, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and the Minister of Transport have tossed the ball back and forth to determine who will repair it.

In my region, various items of infrastructure belong to Transport Canada, and there has been no investment for a number of years.

I think the government should have invested a lot of money in its own infrastructure, which is completely obsolete, particularly in our regions. In my riding alone, I could name at least three port facilities belonging to Transport Canada that are in a fairly advanced state of dilapidation. For example, in Saint-Maxime-du-Mont-Louis, the situation has been disastrous for many years now. However, Transport Canada has not invested a penny, and the infrastructure is splitting in two.

In the stimulus package, how much have you allocated to infrastructure belonging to Transport Canada in Quebec, Newfoundland and Labrador and the Maritimes? The situation is the same in Canada as a whole. I want us to take care of major infrastructure, but there is also infrastructure in the regions.

• (1130)

Hon. John Baird: There are a lot of stimulus funds. Among other things, there is the \$4 billion stimulus fund for infrastructure. We've also announced projects such as the Alexandra bridge, the Chaudière bridge and so on. We're also investing in projects under federal jurisdiction, in particular those of Parks Canada and VIA Rail. We could invest the \$4 billion fund in projects under federal jurisdiction, even if it's in a port that does not come under my department.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: [*Inaudible—Editor*]

Hon. John Baird: We aren't the owners; it's an independent administration. However, they are eligible—

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: You are the owners.

Hon. John Baird: They're also eligible for the \$4 billion fund. If you have any suggestions, I'm prepared to hear them.

I spoke with the people from Sept-Îles and the Port of Quebec. My office has held a few meetings to view the interest expressed. My priority is to work with the provinces and municipalities to make the fund stronger. If the federal, provincial and municipal governments invest, we can create three times as many jobs. I must emphasize that the fisheries sector is receiving funding for small craft harbours.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: That's what I'm expecting from you, minister. You're talking about the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, but I'm talking to you about the Department of Transport.

Hon. John Baird: If you have any suggestions, I'm prepared to listen to you. I've already received a notice from five members in

your caucus. As always, there are more proposals than money available.

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci.*

Mr. Jean, for eight minutes.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Minister, for being here today. I can't tell you how much easier you make our jobs, as government members. I noted before I came to committee today that you've actually been at eight different committee meetings so far, providing information to members, and I can tell you—

Hon. John Baird: I've never had as warm an invitation as I had from the member for Willowdale, and repeated.

Mr. Brian Jean: I note with particular interest that the member for Willowdale has actually had three different briefings from the department as well, so she's obviously up on her files and has many attributes.

Hon. John Baird: She's certainly the best infrastructure critic the Liberal Party has had in this Parliament, by far—smart, on top of her files.

Mr. Brian Jean: Indeed, thank you for that, Mr. Minister. You've made our job a lot easier. You've thrown me off my questions with all those comments.

Hon. John Baird: I could talk more about the member for Willowdale, if you like.

Mr. Brian Jean: Actually, I have enough information here on her. She does stay on top of her files and I'd like to congratulate her for that.

I'm wondering about this, though, sir, as a member of Parliament who represents some 30% of the geography in Alberta. We have a lot of roads, and our population density is obviously quite small. In Canada we have about 1.1 or 1.2 people per square kilometre, and indeed my constituents are worried about roads. They're worried about highways. And now that you've taken the steps with the provinces in such a record time to get that agreement, we are more curious about how you're going to move forward or how the department and this government is going to move forward with the stimulus package in transportation issues across the country.

• (1135)

Hon. John Baird: It does work, I think, asymmetrically in different parts of the country. In some provinces with smaller populations, I think you could argue that they can be more agile because they have projects on the books that they're probably prepared to go forward on.

Obviously, as the Minister of Transport, whether it's public transit, roads, bridges, I give priority to those, at least in my own mind. We are moving to try to have a balanced approach, where we have some municipal projects, some provincial projects, and some federal projects. I think there has been a good amount of progress in Alberta. Obviously there's more work to be done, and every day we do more and move the bar higher.

Mr. Brian Jean: Now, particularly in smaller communities...my riding also includes a lot of forest products industries, and they are concerned. Obviously they're usually in smaller towns, one-industry towns, and I know our government moved forward with a community development package of \$1 billion. Can you tell us what this government is doing for smaller communities that are being hard hit by this economic downturn?

Hon. John Baird: We've tried to have a balanced approach. I represent an urban riding in Ontario, probably the most urban one in the government caucus east of Winnipeg. We think investments in big cities are tremendously important, but so too are investments in rural Canada, so too are investments in smaller communities. One of the things the Minister of Finance put in his budget was a \$500 million community top-up through which, for those provinces that had fully committed their communities' component of Building Canada, there would be additional resources.

I'll give you a quick example. It's not part of the stimulus. We have on one side stimulus initiatives. On the other side, we have a significant program for accelerating the existing Building Canada program. When the Minister of Finance came forward with the \$500 million top-up, with the Province of Ontario, for example—Minister Merrifield, as you know, deals with Alberta infrastructure issues—we were going to announce \$300 million of support for small communities. We were able to identify a billion dollars worth of projects, go three times farther, three times faster. Those were announced in February. So it's not part of the \$4 billion stimulus plan, but part of the accelerated Building Canada Fund, where we're going to be able to get seven years' worth of decisions and work done much more aggressively.

Already in Ontario the call for the top-up has gone forward. So we were already allocated the money for up to 2014, and those projects in many cases are going outside of the \$4 billion stimulus, but we're going to be able to use a significant amount of resources from that \$500 million fund to get more projects going farther, faster. So it's really the two-sided coin. Half of it is accelerating the existing Building Canada Fund and the other half is the additional stimulus measures contained in the budget.

Roads are particularly important for rural Canada, For northern Ontario, they're tremendously important.

Mr. Brian Jean: I'm wondering if you agree with the leader of the Liberal Party when he said that he's perfectly willing to come back in September and October. Do you think that's a reasonable timeframe?

Hon. John Baird: It's a reasonable proposition, and I know the member for Willowdale would agree as well.

Mr. Brian Jean: I had an opportunity to speak to the department in relation to particular provinces that have made applications for this stimulus funding, and I couldn't actually go through all the paperwork before the meeting today, but I was surprised. Has there been a tremendous response from the provinces on these stimulus plans?

Hon. John Baird: I have to tell you the people have put politics aside. I am pleased to report that we've worked very well with Danny Williams' government in Newfoundland. They put politics aside, which is tremendous, to all of our credits. So we are making good progress.

Municipalities are ready; they have a lot of projects. People said two or three months ago, "Municipalities won't have any money. Just give them the cash, because they couldn't possibly match it." They can, right across the country. We will have no problem finding municipalities that will put up cash to have some skin in the game, to build infrastructure projects, whether it's waste water, sewer, public transit, roads, or bridges. It's unbelievable.

• (1140)

Mr. Brian Jean: I appreciate that comment about Newfoundland. I do represent the third largest Newfoundland city in the world, so I'm very appreciative of that.

I also have had some comments from many people who are concerned about the accountability on the funds that are going out the door. I know that you were steering the Federal Accountability Act that this government put forward as our first piece of legislation some three and a half years ago. I'm wondering if you could comment in relation to what the government is doing to ensure that accountability and that reputation the Conservative government has for accountability remains in force.

Hon. John Baird: First and foremost, accountability is important. The biggest built-in accountability measure is that we partner with provinces and municipalities. I just talked about Newfoundland. We have to sit down and work out which projects to support in conjunction with the province and with municipalities. When we're all putting a third up, it does lend itself to more accountability.

One of the things I have to say—and my friend from Quebec will appreciate this—is that it's not the federal government's job to micromanage the provinces and municipalities. We are funding partners; we are not proponents. In an overwhelming number of cases, we're not the ones holding the shovel; it's them. For example, Premier McGuinty brought to the first ministers meeting in January a five-inch binder of paperwork that was required after an announcement. It's our job to be financially supportive of public transit. It's not our job to run the public transit. It's not our job to try to micromanage it.

So we try to be more focused in our accountability mechanisms. But the biggest accountability measure by far is that it's, generally speaking, at least a dual or tripartite approach.

Mr. Brian Jean: Thank you, Minister.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Jean.

Mr. Martin, for an eight-minute round.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Minister, for being here. My colleague noted you've been to eight-some-odd of these committee meetings trying to shed some light on the programs that you oversee. It's like you're on the talk show circuit or something, promoting a movie.

Hon. John Baird: I can tell you that one of the best governments to work with in the country is Gary Doer's Government of Manitoba. They are phenomenal. It is a pleasure to work with Ron Lemieux and Gary Doer.

Mr. Pat Martin: That's because you guys have turned into socialists. Now that you're all a bunch of Keynesians, you get along well with my colleagues in Manitoba.

Hon. John Baird: Gary Doer did tell me that he has a balanced budget. You're giving socialists a bad name, Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: He does, and you know what the small business tax is in the province of Manitoba, Mr. Minister? Zero, a big goose egg. It was 9% when we took over from those tax-and-spend Tories.

Hon. John Baird: If that a proposition? Are you proposing tax cuts here? Because I'll take that back to my cabinet colleagues, if you want me to.

Mr. Pat Martin: Maybe it's just the reason you guys get along so well.

Even though you've been at eight other committees, I put it to you that this is the committee you should be coming to more frequently, more regularly. People should take note that the name of this committee is government operations and estimates. We don't want to wait until after the fact to study your spending of the public accounts to say whether or not it was fruitful, or useful, or whether or not the model was good, or that there's a yardstick to measure progress by.

Speaking of committees, the poor, much-beleaguered Parliamentary Budget Officer is sitting before a committee as we speak in another part of this building. Perhaps the only office that really has fulfilled its mandate coming out of the Federal Accountability Act is the Parliamentary Budget Officer. I argue that we need him more now than ever, when these billions of dollars are flying out the door at breakneck speed.

First of all, you haven't been abundantly clear about the model you've used or the expectations you expect to realize, or the yardstick for measuring progress by for the spending. But you also can't tell me that you can fast-track this amount of spending without sacrificing some due diligence, some oversight, some of the normal accountability associated with infrastructure spending. With the urgency that you've gone into this, with special vote 35, etc., how do you expect your bureaucrats, your team, your skilled and qualified people, to apply the same kind of oversight to this scattergun, free-for-all spending as they do to a normal spending cycle?

Hon. John Baird: I noticed we had questions from the member for Willowdale saying we weren't getting out money fast enough. You're saying that billions of dollars are flying out the door. I wonder what the Bloc would say, because they probably would have a balanced approach in the middle.

• (1145)

Mr. Pat Martin: Somewhere in there.

Hon. John Baird: I would say this. We obviously did bring in a five-point action plan on issues like the navigable waters, issues like

the changes we made to environmental assessments with Gary Doer's endorsement, and other changes. This has been absolutely essential, because you couldn't do what you were doing in the past with all the projects in the future. That's what our five-point action plan was about.

But at the end of the day, if it's a provincial project, we're a financial partner. At the end of the day, Gary Doer will be held accountable by the people of Manitoba and by the legislature of Manitoba, and by the Auditor General of Manitoba, or a given municipality.

Mr. Pat Martin: We could take that reasoning even further, Minister.

I'm confused. If there was an urgency to get this money out there and get it working, why did you choose such a cumbersome model in order to work with the municipalities? The leader of our party, Jack Layton, has been up in the House asking why you didn't adopt a tried and true model such as the gas tax rebate to the municipalities, and simply give it to those municipalities and let them spend it on the list of priorities that they already have had established. We have about a 30-year deficit of infrastructure in most municipalities. There was no shortage of projects they could have got busy on right away. Why choose a model so cumbersome that it has led to real difficulties?

Hon. John Baird: I'll say three things.

First, we doubled the infrastructure, the gas tax model. We doubled it as of April 1. We brought it forward from July to April. I think if you checked with a lot of cities, you'd find they didn't spend 100% of the money in the first month or two of the fiscal year in the past and they probably won't now, because it takes a significant amount of work to make things happen. That was the first reason.

The second reason was that we wanted to leverage partnerships. We wanted to get provinces and municipalities to have some skin in the game, to match our investments, so that instead of creating one job, we could create three. People said municipalities wouldn't have the money; well, we put the lie to that. There are plenty of municipalities in every corner of this country that do, so we've been able to leverage and create three times as much.

Third, I think there were some legitimate concerns. Our government had challenges, and the previous Liberal government had challenges. You'd allocate money in a budget; then you'd spend a year, or sometimes two or three, negotiating with the provinces for an agreement, and then you'd have to identify projects after that. I think my departmental officials have done an incredible amount of work in an incredibly short period of time. I'm not going to lie to you—things are happening faster in Manitoba because the governments have a good relationship, and that's good news, but I think it was for those three reasons that we wanted to do it.

I can speak about my own municipality. They got money for infrastructure that they spent on clearing snow. The Government of Ontario had to amend some of their financing rules, because the better part of the \$200 million that was given to one municipality was used to pay off debt, not to build infrastructure.

It's a good model, but it's not without its downsides as well.

I think that you will see in Canada a demonstrably faster approach, certainly with the \$4 billion stimulus and with the acceleration of Building Canada Fund. I dare say that if you were to pick up the phone and call Gary Doer now and say, "Is John Baird making things happen on infrastructure in Manitoba?", he'd say, "You bet. You bet your boots."

Mr. Pat Martin: He'd also say, "Get him to send some more money", because that's our job, to bring home the bacon.

Hon. John Baird: I've never met an elected official who couldn't spend more money than they have.

Mr. Pat Martin: Let me ask you something. You've come to this job by an interesting route. You were the President of the Treasury Board, then you were the Minister of the Environment, and now you're minister for infrastructure.

I'm interested in the environmental component. Something we're seeing with the stimulus package in the U.S. is that they're really using the money to implement some transformative change in energy and environmental issues. This Blue Green Alliance in the United States is very exciting. It's taking infrastructure stimulus money not just to patch up the existing generating stations or power plants, but to transform and steer the country in the direction it needs to go. The work that needs to be done to save the planet may be the work that we can do now to stimulate the economy and get through this downturn.

What portion of your infrastructure priority spending has gone towards the green component?

Hon. John Baird: It would be different on a province-by-province basis.

In my constituency, my hometown, clean water is an issue; secondary raw effluent going into the Ottawa River has been a huge problem. Water quality has been a big issue in Manitoba. A lot of significant investments are going into sewer and water projects. Smaller municipalities in particular are very agile and can move very quickly. If you've got a \$1 million project as opposed to a \$1 billion subway, you can move more quickly. A significant amount is going into sewer and waste water treatment.

We have had, and will continue to make, significant investments in public transit. We're making investments in Via Rail in central Canada.

We do have two green funds. Manitoba's Greg Salinger is pushing a project to get four northern Manitoba communities on the grid so that they're not using diesel to generate electricity. That would be good for air quality and be good for the fight against climate change, but it would also be cheaper, because the cost of flying in diesel is exorbitantly expensive.

• (1150)

Mr. Pat Martin: All I'm saying is that with this massive rollout of dough we could be looking at transformative things. The east-west bridge, for instance.

Hon. John Baird: You couldn't do that as a stimulus project. It wouldn't happen in two years.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Martin.

Ms. Foote. And we're in five-minute rounds now.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I welcome Minister Baird and his team. I appreciate that you're here this morning. Congratulations as well for making the reference to "from coast to coast to coast". That doesn't always happen. Usually references throughout this country are just "from coast to coast".

I'm also pleased that several of our colleagues this morning have made reference to Newfoundland and Labrador. I'm going to take advantage of that and speak to what I think is a shortcoming with respect to the stimulus funding and the whole idea of matching funds.

I know you said communities are not having difficulty coming up with their one third, or whatever portion they have to come up with, but that certainly would not be the case in a fair number of rural communities, particularly in Newfoundland and Labrador and, I expect, in rural Canada. Have you given any thought to recognizing that this is a problem for a number of rural communities?

I'll give you an example, one that you and I have discussed before, and that is Fortune on the Burin Peninsula in Newfoundland and Labrador. The harbour is owned by Transport Canada, but they have a desperate need to have that harbour dredged; otherwise boats just aren't going to be able to get into that harbour. It's the economic engine of the community and the entire Burin Peninsula, to some degree, with the fish plant and the fact that it's the gateway to the French Islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon. I was disappointed that this wasn't part of the announcement that was made for Newfoundland and Labrador. I appreciate that you deal with provincial governments on the issue, but you and I know the community of Fortune has appealed to you directly. There is no way that Fortune will ever be able to come up with a percentage of matching dollars.

How do you expect a community like Fortune, which is dealing with a problem in terms of property owned by Transport Canada...? If the government doesn't move to do something about it, we're going to see the community die.

Hon. John Baird: You've mentioned a number of issues.

Would you have a \$2 billion loan program under Minister Finlay to provide support to municipalities? We're borrowing money too. We don't have it. So is the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador. The municipalities are in a similar boat to ours. We provide one third for municipal projects. I understand the Province of Newfoundland has a sliding scale that contributes depending on the size of the municipality. These are under provincial jurisdiction, and good for Newfoundland for doing that. Not all municipalities in Newfoundland have to come up with their third.

We are making announcements this morning that Newfoundland is the first province in the country where we have fully allocated all the stimulus money: all the Building Canada money, all the MRIF and CSIF money. They're the first province. Not only are we getting it done, we're getting it done first in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Ms. Judy Foote: Minister, I appreciate that, and I've heard you talk about the money that's been flowing. My question again goes back to matching funds, if you have a municipality where they don't have access to funds for the matching portion.

Hon. John Baird: In Fortune that is a federal asset. Of course, we can spend money on federal assets outside the Building Canada stimulus funds. You've certainly raised the issue with me, and it's certainly something that is under consideration.

I can tell you that municipalities, big or small, aren't in the habit of coming up with money for federal infrastructure anywhere in the country.

• (1155)

Ms. Judy Foote: They're desperate there. What I'm saying is that if you're not going to move on a piece of infrastructure that belongs to Transport Canada, then they have to look to other avenues and they don't have the matching funds. I'm imploring you to recognize that this needs to be done.

Hon. John Baird: Municipalities aren't asked to come up with matching funds for a federally owned project. The odd one may, but generally speaking, federal assets aren't something that we're looking to. They can be, as I said to our friends from Quebec, but they're not generally the first priority.

I've taken note of the Fortune issue, but I'll tell you, when it comes to the stimulus, or Building Canada, we're working with Danny Williams. We're getting things done for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and we're getting them done faster there, which is great news.

Ms. Judy Foote: Congratulations on that.

Hon. John Baird: I appreciate that.

Ms. Judy Foote: But again I go back to the issue with respect to Fortune. Absolutely, it's property owned by Transport Canada. But at the end of the day, if you're not going to do something as the minister

responsible, they've got to look to other avenues. So I'm imploring you to take this—

Hon. John Baird: I appreciate the advice. Listen, Mr. Martin talked about a 30-year deficit that municipalities have for infrastructure. I have a 30-year deficit at Transport Canada. There's always greater demand than there is the ability to meet it. That's not unique to infrastructure. It's not unique to health care or education. It's not unique to public transit. It's the case everywhere. But I appreciate your wise counsel, and I'll certainly commit to sitting down with Mr. Ranger here to chat about it.

Ms. Judy Foote: I appreciate that, and I will get back to you on that again, as you know.

Hon. John Baird: I'm sure you will.

The Chair: Thank you. The phone lines are open.

I'll go to Monsieur Roy for *cinq minutes et ensuite Monsieur Gourde pour cinq minutes*.

Monsieur Roy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Minister, I would like to go back to the question I addressed earlier and that my colleague subsequently took up as well.

With regard to infrastructure belonging to Transport Canada in the regions, there has not been any investment in years. You say no contribution is being requested from the municipalities.

I'm sorry to contradict you, but under the transfer program, a contribution has been requested from the municipalities. A municipality of 1,500 inhabitants cannot invest \$2 million to \$3 million to repair infrastructure belonging to the federal government. That's what I was explaining to you.

Under the transfer program, that's precisely what is being asked of the municipalities. They're being asked to take charge of infrastructure once it is repaired. However, you first have to repair it. That's where the problem lies.

Transport Canada hasn't made any investment in this infrastructure, which belongs to it, for years. Let's get it straight. Of course Public Works is involved in the process because it's the department that must subsequently take action. The fact remains that this infrastructure belongs to the federal government.

My question is simple. What have you planned for infrastructure belonging to Transport Canada, beyond that mentioned? I'm not talking to you about Vancouver or major infrastructure, such as the Champlain bridge. I'm talking to you about infrastructure that belongs to Transport Canada in the regions. What has been allocated under the budget? What will you do for the dilapidated Transport Canada infrastructure everywhere?

Hon. John Baird: I'll ask my colleague and deputy minister to provide you with specific details.

Mr. Louis Ranger (Deputy Head, Infrastructure Canada): There is a major fund for small craft harbours, but in a particular context, divestiture. It is interesting that the question was asked this morning with regard to Newfoundland and Labrador and Quebec, because these are the two provinces that have not availed themselves of existing programs. We've divested hundreds of small craft harbours through a model that has been very successful elsewhere.

The money is available if we want to form a partnership with the municipalities or with anyone wishing to own the port. We are also committed to restoring the port to an acceptable condition with significant investments and conditions that have been proven elsewhere.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Yes, I entirely agree with you.

Mr. Louis Ranger: So there is significant funding.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: I know the program, but I'm explaining to you that it is distinctly inadequate. I'll give you a very concrete example. Saint-Maxime-du-Mont-Louis is a municipality of 1,500 inhabitants. The department turned over some infrastructure to it and told it that it will repair it completely. However, in 20 years, the municipality will be utterly incapable of spending \$2 million, \$3 million or \$4 million to repair the infrastructure. That's what you must understand. The reason the program has not worked in Quebec is that the department is asking small municipalities to take charge of infrastructure that will subsequently cost them a fortune. These municipalities will be unable to bear the responsibility. That's the defect of the program.

• (1200)

Mr. Louis Ranger: The calculation of the amount we remit does not just include repairs. We also grant money to future owners and we do a calculation spread over a number of years, including the operating expenses they will have to incur. However, there are ports—I don't want to name one in particular—that haven't seen any boats for 10 years.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Yes, absolutely.

Mr. Louis Ranger: We also have to agree on the purpose of a port. If it is used for fishing on Sunday afternoons, it's hard to justify millions of dollars for that.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: With regard to the example I'm giving you, the municipality has agreed on a purpose, but the issue has been dragging for 10 years. Transport Canada has always answered that it didn't have the necessary money. That's what I want to explain to you.

Mr. Louis Ranger: I can assure you that the funding is still there. And even if the funds haven't been spent and the temptation to use the funds elsewhere is sometimes great, we maintain that budget in the event there are opportunities for partnerships with the municipalities.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: Yes.

You're telling us that the Government of Quebec doesn't want to participate; that's possible, but I nevertheless have a question for you, minister.

You're going to explain to me why all the mayors of Quebec municipalities are crying out and asking the federal and Quebec governments why the funding hasn't been released.

You tell us there's been an agreement. So why hasn't the funding been released? Why does this drag on? What's preventing the two levels of government from moving forward?

In the case of the majority of municipalities that I know of—I was a mayor for a long time—we always had projects on the back burner, many more than the available funding could cover. That's still the case today. Explain to me what isn't working. Why are the municipalities, all the municipalities represented by 100 participants, telling us that it's not working, that the money isn't being paid and that the projects aren't being accepted. What is the problem?

Hon. John Baird: The Union des municipalités du Québec says the same thing. It's not just the federal government's fault; there's also the provincial government. We're going to report to the House of Commons in June. I should point out that I'm spending personal time on this file. It's a priority to try to work well with Quebec. We'll see what's in the report in June. We announced \$350 million, one-third for PRECO and for those kinds of projects. You'll get a list in June. If you have any other specific ideas, I'm still prepared to hear your opinion.

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy: What are you going to tell the municipal representatives this afternoon?

Hon. John Baird: If you want to hear the Prime Minister himself, you're welcome.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Chair: You're out of time.

Merci.

[*Translation*]

Hon. John Baird: As a former mayor and member from Quebec, you're always welcome.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[*English*]

The Chair: *Merci.*

Monsieur Gourde, pour cinq minutes.

And Minister, we're up to about noon now, and Monsieur Gourde has at least the next five minutes, if that's okay.

Monsieur Gourde.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you very much for being here, minister. You always have very good answers, and it's very much appreciated.

I've heard a lot about efforts to cut red tape and speed up investments in infrastructure. Could you please explain to me what the government has done since the budget to achieve those objectives?

Hon. John Baird: Oh, I must tell you that your answers during question period are good too, Mr. Gourde.

I must say we've established a five-part action plan for infrastructure so that things move more quickly. We've tabled the budget bill, we've made changes to environmental studies and the way we work with the provinces for this stimulus funding.

It's essential to have good partnerships. It isn't always easy; every level of government has its own priorities. It's essential to work together, to approve a good list that meets needs in the areas of public transit, culture, roads, bridges...

We've made progress with regard to Quebec. It isn't as quick as I would like, but we're going to table a report in the House in June. We made good announcements in Thetford Mines, and Lévis. There's PRECO.

We also have a list under review, and I'm hoping that, in the coming days or weeks, there will be new announcements and new projects that can start up as soon as possible.

The proposal has changed a great deal. I'm a former provincial minister and I respect provincial jurisdictions. The provinces don't work for the Government of Canada. We're working in partnership. In the partnership, it's not our responsibility to micro-manage every project.

I hope that the provinces will ultimately be happy with the results. As a large number of projects will be carried out in the provinces, I would like to emphasize that cultural projects are important. We made a good announcement yesterday of a cultural project and we will be doing more in future. I'm sure this is a priority for your citizens as well.

• (1205)

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Minister, because Canada is a large country, roads and highways are vital to our economy.

Could you tell us about how the government is investing in our transportation infrastructure?

Hon. John Baird: Of course.

Another priority of the Government of Canada for the infrastructure fund are highways and national highways. We've done a lot in suburban Montreal in the past few years, and we are ready to do more. The new funds are for those kinds of projects: road and highway projects are eligible and the funding is available.

How are these investments being made? There are cost-shared projects between the federal and provincial governments. There are others in which the municipal level is taking part and for which costs are shared three ways. We're going to continue maintaining this priority.

I must also emphasize that public transit is a priority for me, as a former Minister of the Environment. It's important for the major cities, such as Quebec City, Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. We're ready to do more in that sector as well.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Chairman, I would now like to leave a little of my time for my colleague Mr. Brown so that he can ask a final question.

[*English*]

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC): Minister Baird, the highlight for me of watching all these infrastructure announcements that

you've made across the country was the opening of the GO Train in Barrie. Provincial Liberals in attendance commented affectionately about how fast the federal government was moving on infrastructure. I consider this to be a tremendous sign of cooperation—the McGuinty Liberal government is now praising your work.

I thought maybe you could comment on how this has been successful in Ontario. What are your findings on the success of the infrastructure agreement with the province of Ontario?

Hon. John Baird: That's a tough one, but I'll take a stab at it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. John Baird: During the economic downturn, for the most part, we've seen people put aside partisan politics and try to work in the national interest, although there have been some bumps along the road. I served with Mr. McGuinty for 10 and a half years. I was an aggressive critic. When I had that responsibility, I used to sit directly opposite the minister I now work with. I think we can put politics aside and do what's best for the people.

It's not unknown to Ms. Foote or others on the committee that we have not always had a perfect working relationship with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador. But we've been able to that aside and do what's best for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. We've also been able to work with a Liberal governments in British Columbia and New Brunswick.

I've even noticed, in particular in my own province of Ontario, federal and provincial members who weren't on the best of terms beginning to work well together, whether it's in central Ontario, eastern Ontario, or southwestern Ontario. I think that speaks well for the political system.

I think the public wants to see everyone on the same page. They want to see everyone in the same boat with an oar in the water, rowing together. If we work together, we can do three times as much for the economy in job creation and infrastructure investments. Still, leadership does come from the top, and I think in the province of Ontario the Prime Minister and Premier McGuinty have provided that leadership.

• (1210)

The Chair: Just before we wrap up your testimony, Minister, I know the member for Willowdale, to whose very warm invitation you responded today, wanted to thank you. She might have one question she would append to the thank you.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Minister, I do wish to thank you and everyone else for being here.

I just had one clarification, though, that I would like—

Hon. John Baird: I thought you were stalking me for a while in question period.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Only out of pure affection.

When the Building Canada Fund was announced in 2007, it was done with much fanfare. This was to be long-term, predictable funding to build the infrastructure that we needed in this country. It was announced in 2007. We know that of the allocations that were made for 2007 to 2009, less than 5% actually flowed. Today, you yourself acknowledged that the Building Canada Fund has simply not worked. How are you managing to speed things up, when all of the stimulus infrastructure money is supplied in the same fashion as the money for the Building Canada Fund, with a matching funds requirement?

I have before me a one-page application form for money from the fund. If indeed you are speeding this up somehow, does this provide accountability? As for the attestation at the bottom, where the applicant warrants that the project would not be built without federal funds, we are hearing that people are attesting this even though it's not true, just to get the money. This calls the accountability into question. How are you speeding things up with a program that's built exactly like the Building Canada Fund? Is the level of accountability adequate?

Hon. John Baird: You mentioned a number of things.

I think that as a member of Parliament, you have a responsibility. If you're aware of a single fraud by a municipality making a false attestation, you have a responsibility to report that.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: And you do know that we are getting these on a no-names basis, specifically because—

Hon. John Baird: So you can't name a single municipality where this is happening?

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I would actually suggest, Minister—

Hon. John Baird: I was worried there for a minute.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: —that if this is an application coming to the department, I would hope the department is checking the veracity of the application.

Hon. John Baird: I was worried there for a moment. You sort of indicated that you had a good number of examples.

The fundamental premise behind this—and it's not complicated—with this stimulus money, which is \$4 billion extra, \$12 billion across government of new money to provide economic stimulus....

Just down the street from Parliament Hill, Bank Street is being repaired. It was going to be repaired before the economic statement this year. What we didn't want to do is simply have the municipality pull money out and put federal and provincial money in. We wanted this to be something above and beyond what you'd normally do. And I have to say, generally speaking, that's been fairly well responded to.

With respect to Building Canada, you perhaps went further than I would have. I said there were some really legitimate concerns about Building Canada. I didn't say it wasn't working.

I'll give you an example from just about five or ten kilometres from your own constituency. Two years ago we announced funding for the Spadina subway extension, and no money has flowed. The reason is that they just started construction a few weeks ago, and they hadn't invoiced us yet. You don't build a \$2 billion subway

expansion overnight. It takes a huge amount of planning and contracting and engineering work.

So Building Canada is for the larger projects, the ones that simply.... You can't build a subway or a major public transit thing in two years. The stimulus funding, by and large, will be for smaller projects, where they can move more quickly, where things are more short term.

I think it is important that we respond and that there are good investments and benefits beyond the jobs created in the short term, and beyond the infrastructure, whether they're environmental or they're reducing congestion, or whether it's supporting the economy and economic growth.

But I think what we are doing is accelerating Building Canada. In large measure, some of that is political bickering. If we can use these economic hard times and the good relationships that are developing unexpectedly at the federal-provincial relations table, let's strike while the iron is hot and get a lot of approvals in place, even though they'll go well beyond 2011. Building Canada goes until 2014, but I'm saying let's get these projects approved now for 2012, because you can't just flick a switch and start a billion-dollar project. We're striking while the iron is hot to try to make things happen.

The Chair: I want to thank you, Minister, and your officials for your attendance today. It has been very helpful.

Colleagues, we'll suspend for two minutes while we bring in our next witness from Treasury Board on the subject of stimulus spending.

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_____ (Pause) _____

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• (1220)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order, colleagues.

We're back in session, and the second part of our meeting involves a review, in very prompt order, of the supplementary estimates (A), which were tabled less than a couple of hours ago in the House. Returning as witnesses, we have Mr. Alister Smith, assistant secretary, expenditure management sector from the Treasury Board Secretariat; and Mr. Brian Pagan, executive director, expenditure operations and estimates division.

We have the experts in front of us, so I'm pretty sure members will have questions with respect to actual spending for stimulus purposes under previous or existing Treasury Board authorizations.

Mr. Smith, if you have an opening statement with respect to this, please proceed.

[Translation]

Mr. Alister Smith (Assistant Secretary, Expenditure Management Sector, Treasury Board Secretariat): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you once again for the invitation to attend. With me is my colleague Brian Pagan, who is Executive Director, Expenditure Operations and Estimates.

Today, the President of the Treasury Board tabled Supplementary Estimates (A) for 2009-10. This is only the second year in the last decade that the government has filed supplementary estimates in the spring. We have circulated a brief deck providing the highlights.

[English]

These supplementary estimates include \$5 billion in voted budgetary initiatives, including \$1.6 billion of budget 2009 initiatives. They also report on an additional \$1.8 billion of allocations from the budget implementation vote, TB vote 35, for budget 2009 initiatives. A total of \$3.4 billion in voted spending on budget initiatives is, therefore, reported in this package. The supplementary estimates also provide information on a \$50 billion non-budgetary initiative for CMHC's insured mortgage purchase plan, designed to stimulate housing construction.

Individual budget 2009 initiatives are tagged for easy identification in the supplementary estimates (A) document, tabled today, and in the explanation of requirements section for each department or agency.

As mentioned previously, TB vote 35 is an extraordinary time-limited mechanism created, through Parliament's approval, to facilitate budget implementation. Based on Parliament's approval of interim supply, funds can be allocated by TB ministers from this central vote during the April 1 to June 30 timeframe, to meet cash requirements for budget 2009 initiatives in advance of supply for supplementary estimates (A) or (B).

The list of budget 2009 initiatives funded from TB vote 35 up to April 30 can be found on pages 77 to 82 of the supplementary estimates (A) document. Further allocations from this vote are expected as departments finalize terms and conditions of budget programs.

Allocations for the period from May 1 to June 30 will be reported in supplementary estimates (B) documents. These allocations will also be reported in the quarterly reports for June, September, and December.

In summary, with the approval of supplementary estimates (A), the total funding for 2009-10 budget initiatives, taking into account tax reduction measures and new loan authorities, will be in excess of \$20 billion. In addition to the supps (A) and TB vote 35 measures reported here, this includes \$10 billion of support in the Budget Implementation Act, as well as ways and means measures such as the home renovation tax credit and loan authorities for the auto industry and housing-related infrastructure.

• (1225)

[Translation]

Thank you. We would be happy to take questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Smith

Ms. Hall Findlay, for eight minutes.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, both of you, for being here today and understanding that we only just received these, so our questions may not be as detailed as we would like.

I have a quick question on the budget implementation initiatives under vote 35. Thank you for pointing out the specific pages of where they are. I note that there's a total of approximately \$1.187 billion of that—

Mr. Alister Smith: It is \$1.8 billion.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: I'm sorry, that's the total, but the balance was \$1.1 billion. So it is \$1.8 billion.

Of these moneys, if you can clarify for me the process, how much has been allocated as opposed to spent? I look at different departments—Environment, Parks Canada, some aspects under HRSDC, and Natural Resources. There are obviously a number of departments in which an amount of money has been allocated.

We've had this discussion at a number of other committee meetings, and I appreciate again your patience with us. The reason the Liberals in opposition approved this vote 35, despite the lack of upfront knowledge about where it would go, was for the purpose of allowing money to flow as quickly as possible. Can you explain to me how much of this \$1.8 billion has actually flowed to the departments? Can you speak to the direct linkage, if any, in terms of money spent through these immediate allocations and the actual creation of jobs at this point in time?

Mr. Alister Smith: There are several questions there, and I'll try to address them all.

Virtually all the funding here has been allocated to departments, so what was allocated in the central vote is now with departments.

How much is spent, of course, depends on the program or initiative. There is work under way on many of these initiatives, and indeed, funding is flowing. We are trying to assess, on an ongoing basis, and certainly for the June reports and other reports, precisely how much money is flowing. But the first issue here was to ensure that the funding was allocated so that there would be no blockages for municipalities or provinces and others involved because we had a very rigid supplementary estimates (A) schedule. I think we've overcome that; bridge funding has been provided.

I can give you a couple of examples, if you like. If you turn to the allocations, about 35 allocations, on page 77, for Parks Canada for the Trans-Canada Highway, work is under way there. On the Strategic Training and Transition Fund, agreements have been signed with three provinces—full agreements—and there are nine agreements in principle with others.

For the marquee tourism events, funds are flowing to individual marquee festivals. For the NRC industrial research assistance program, or IRAP, they are hiring graduate students and assistants. For Public Works infrastructure projects, contracts have been issued and work is under way on many individual projects. Work is under way on the bridges, as Mr. Baird mentioned. For Revenue Canada, this funding has assisted in the implementation of the budget tax measures. Knowledge infrastructure program agreements have been signed with B.C. and Nova Scotia, and projects have been identified.

There's a whole range of different states of progress on all these initiatives. But funds are flowing and progress is being made.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you.

In the last few days, there have been significant media reports about the Auditor General's report, which highlighted, in particular, challenges to a number of bridges in the province of Quebec. In the Auditor General's report, she made quite specific recommendations for funding. Without having a chance to look through the supplementary estimates here, but recalling that in the reports I certainly heard that representatives from the government had committed to, in fact, implementing all the AG's recommendations, is that the case? Is there anything in here, and if not, will we see that in a future commitment?

• (1230)

Mr. Alister Smith: Certainly there's funding under Public Works to repair a number of bridges, at least four federal bridges, including two in this area: the Burlington Canal Lift Bridge and a fourth bridge. I know that there's also funding here under Transport for the Champlain Bridge, which is Canada's largest and busiest bridge, in Montreal.

So indeed, this funding is flowing for the purposes of the bridge work.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Do you know offhand if these supplementary estimates actually cover what the Auditor General is recommending, or if revisions will have to be made? Will additional moneys have to be committed in order for the government...? As I understood, they acknowledged the AG's recommendation and said we will do this. Will money have to be added?

I just have not had the chance to look to make the comparison. Do you know?

Mr. Alister Smith: No, that I don't know for sure without reading that chapter of her report to see whether all of the recommendations would be met with these investments. Clearly, they're meeting some of the needs that she identified in her report.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Now I'm going to be relying on you. Is there anything in the supplementary estimates that you can highlight for us that is out of the norm, as we take them home for bedtime reading? We will be sure to find more, but is there anything? We know about vote 35. But is there anything here that you would

recommend we focus on, or is there something out of the norm that you can highlight?

Mr. Alister Smith: I don't think there's anything that's really out of the norm.

Due diligence has been applied to these allocations to the TB vote 35 in the same way as applied to the supplementary estimates (A) allocations. We have very good assistance from departments in ensuring that the costs they provide us are bona fide. Their chief financial officers attest to those numbers.

Our responsibility is to ensure that the program's terms and conditions are appropriate and the initiatives are properly funded according to the budget and within the budget confines. Once the program is in operation, the operational aspects of that program are very much with the department and with the provinces and municipalities.

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Do I have any time left?

The Chair: No, we're at exactly eight minutes now.

I'm sorry. I'm going to Madame Bourgeois.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, Mr. Smith and Mr. Pagan. Thank you for being here again this morning. We ask you to testify often, and your answers are extremely important for us.

Mr. Smith, when you came to see us last time, we asked a lot of questions about the speed with which the stimulus package was being implemented. We were wondering whether there might be some slippage in the allocation of funding to specific projects.

You've just told us that funding is currently in the hands of the departments. Were you able to guarantee us that the departments were not going off track?

[*English*]

Mr. Alister Smith: The funding is provided to departments for these initiatives. They're responsible for implementing the initiatives under the terms and conditions of their programs. They have deputy heads as accounting officers who are responsible. Mr. Martin, in particular, who had a great deal to do with the Federal Accountability Act, will know all of these features. Deputy heads as accounting officers have the responsibility to ensure that funds are properly used.

We ourselves are gathering information from departments for the use of the quarterly reports to try to ensure that, in fact, funds are being used for the initiatives for which they've been allocated. In terms of slippage, I think maybe your question is a broader question. Some programs will go faster than others, and sometimes negotiations with provinces and municipalities will occur faster than others, as Hon. John Bairdsaid.

So it's hard to generalize. But I think so far, so good. I think this stimulus package is off to a good start.

• (1235)

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Thank you.

In your opening statement, you said: "The Supplementary Estimates also provide information on a \$50 million non-budgetary initiative for CHMC's Insured Mortgage Purchase designed to stimulate housing construction."

When a person who does not have a lot of money does business with CHMC for his mortgage, he always pays more. CHMC is more expensive than a bank or a *caisse populaire*.

What is an insured mortgage purchase program? If people have a loan at 6.5%, can they renegotiate their rate with CHMC? Could CHMC grant them a loan at the current market rate, which is approximately 1.95%?

[English]

Mr. Alister Smith: They can't do it that directly. The funding here is provided for buying back, if you wish, bundles of mortgage-backed securities, which allows the banks to then lend more money at lower rates to Canadians. And therefore, through that, indirectly it would reduce borrowing costs for Canadians. But it's really to buy back, through this mortgage purchase program, mortgage-backed securities to ensure that the banks can continue to lend at the rates—

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: So this program is for banks and not for individuals.

Mr. Alister Smith: It's also intended for individuals.

[English]

It's just that it's indirect. If the banks were blocked in lending and didn't want to take on additional mortgages, that would be a big problem for ordinary Canadians who were trying to get mortgages. So this takes some of those mortgages off the books of the banks, and indeed it's been a relatively successful initiative as part of the extraordinary financing framework.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: You'll understand why I'm very skeptical about this program, which I think is window-dressing. Ultimately, if you want to renegotiate your mortgage with a bank, according to your mortgage contract, you can pay a three-month penalty or the bank can also not want to reopen your mortgage, and so on.

I know that you're not the person responsible, but I'm questioning this program, which helps the banks but not the individual homeowner. It's part of CHMC's mission to help individual homeowners, among others.

On page 80 of the Supplementary Estimates, at Industry Canada, under "National Research Council of Canada", reference is made to the Industrial Research Assistance Program, the IRAP, about which it states: "To proceed immediately with the implementation of expansion measures [...]" to assist small and medium-size enterprises.

Have any funds already been released? Have you received any requests? Have any steps been taken to make this program work for SMEs?

[English]

Mr. Alister Smith: What I know so far is that funds are flowing through this program, and that they are hiring graduate students—assistants—for the program. So things are under way. I don't know to what extent that's occurring. We are gathering that information now from departments and agencies, but I believe that one is under way.

• (1240)

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: I don't understand why students are being hired. This is about direct financial assistance to small and medium-size enterprises.

[English]

Mr. Alister Smith: The way this program works is through contributions by NRC IRAP for research and development in small and medium-size enterprises. So these are firms of up to 500 employees. Essentially the contributions are provided to them so they can hire graduates holding advanced or specialized degrees to work on technology development projects. That's the way it works.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Perfect, thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[English]

The Chair: *Merci*.

We'll have Mr. Anders for an eight-minute round.

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): I'm not sure if I'll take up my full eight minutes, Mr. Chair, so maybe one of my colleagues ought to be prepared just in case.

I have a couple of questions I'm intrigued by, although I'm not sure if they'll pertain totally to small and medium enterprises. On page 115, there is an expenditure there that could be in thousands of dollars, although I would be shocked if that were the case, because the amount listed is \$99,550,000. It's for contributions to the Canadian Television Fund.

I guess I'll ask a series of questions. What exactly are we getting for \$99 million, or just short of \$100 million, for the Canadian Television Fund?

Another question I have goes back to page 49, where we have \$142,520,208 for the Canadian International Development Agency. There, I guess one of the questions that comes to the top of my mind is in regard to a young man I remember from when I was chair of the veterans affairs committee. He had lost his leg to an improvised explosive device in Afghanistan, and he was looking for about \$135,000 for the replacement of one limb and a portion of the other. I wonder if we divided \$142,520,208 by \$135,000, how many limbs that would buy, because he still hadn't received that funding.

I'm also intrigued by page 163 dealing with Industry Canada, where we originally had close to \$637 million allocated for grants. That amount went up by another \$85 million, or close to \$86 million, for a grand total of close to \$723 million in grants.

I'm intrigued why there are so many more grants in Industry Canada.

Those are my three questions off the top.

Mr. Alister Smith: Perhaps I can start with the first one, the Canadian Television Fund, and my colleague Brian Pagan can help me with this as well.

The Canadian Television Fund is a private-public partnership that provides support for the production of high-quality, distinctively Canadian television programs. It's administered by the Canadian Television Fund Corporation, which is a not-for-profit private corporation. Budget 2009 provided \$100 million more for this program in 2009-10 and 2010-11. This level of funding, combined with \$20 million in existing reference levels for Canadian Heritage, is consistent with the level of support provided in previous years by the Government of Canada for the Canadian Television Fund. So in effect, as a result of the budget, this essentially keeps the level of funding level with previous years to support distinctively Canadian programs.

Brian, do you want to take the next one?

Mr. Brian Pagan (Executive Director, Expenditure Operations and Estimates Division, Treasury Board Secretariat): In response to what I believe was your third question on the elements comprising the increase in grants in Industry Canada—vote 10 is their grant vote—there are a number of factors contributing to this increase, most of which are related to budget 2009 priorities.

As an example, funding to support marquee festivals and events was a flagship element of budget 2009. Industry Canada is looking for \$17.6 million in vote 10 to provide transfers to marquee events across the country. I believe there have been recent announcements related to the Stratford Festival, the Calgary Stampede, and some music festivals.

Funding to provide a grant to the University of Waterloo in support of the construction and establishment of a new world-class research facility, called the Institute for Quantum Computing, is worth \$16.5 million. Again, that was a budget 2009 initiative.

Funding to support strategic investments in the Technology Partnerships Canada program and the strategic aerospace and defence initiative comprises grants totalling \$32.9 million to Industry Canada in support of development.

I believe those three represent the lion's share of grants, but there are a number of initiatives.

Perhaps it would be constructive for members to look at the ministry summary and then at the explanation of requirements for Industry Canada, beginning on page 166, because for each element in the supplementary estimates requiring funding, there is a brief explanation there. At the top of that page, we break it down by the vote: vote 1, vote 5, and vote 10. For Industry Canada, its grant total of \$85.7 million is easily identifiable by the distinct elements in vote 10.

I believe your second question related to CIDA.

• (1245)

Mr. Alister Smith: CIDA is seeking \$140 million in new funding to support a number of development commitments this year, \$70 million of which is to respond to increasing global food aid requirements, consistent with Canada's commitment to a food aid convention. There is also support for the Government of Canada's engagement in the Americas. As you know, a fair amount of existing CIDA funding is also devoted to supporting our development efforts in Afghanistan. There's a wide range of other elements under the CIDA supplementary estimates here.

I think your point is about the relative priority perhaps of CIDA funding versus support for veterans and other Canadians.

Mr. Rob Anders: That is the point I was making, that the increase in funding to CIDA would buy over 1,000 soldiers' legs. That was my point.

The Chair: Does that wrap up your line of questioning?

Mr. Rob Anders: I think that wraps it up for now, sir, unless I have a colleague on my side who'd like to pick it up.

The Chair: There are about 20 or 30 seconds left.

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): I'll go in the next round with my other colleagues.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. Martin, for an opening round.

Mr. Pat Martin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I guess I'm as much, or perhaps even more, interested in the process as the numbers. The numbers are so huge they're almost meaningless to me in many respects, although I appreciate knowing where they're going. They don't really tell us much of a story unless they are broken down in a lot greater detail.

Vote 35 really didn't contemplate any new spending. If I understand, it took spending that was to take place anyway and gave licence to roll it out more quickly—to roll out eleven-twelfths instead of three-twelfths. Correct?

Mr. Alister Smith: Right. It's a bridge funding mechanism; there's no new money here. The budget established, essentially, the envelope funds.

This mechanism allows us to bridge-fund to supplementary estimates and thereby avoid any unnatural breakages that would not allow us to implement some of these programs. Essentially it's based on cash requirements. It's a bridge to the supplementary estimates (A) or (B), based on the cash needs of departments. We don't want departments to try to implement the scale of this budget—and you mentioned its large scale—by dipping into existing funds and starving existing programs, when in fact—

•(1250)

Mr. Pat Martin: Instead of robbing Peter to pay Paul, this lets them be more open and transparent about it.

Mr. Alister Smith: Precisely.

Mr. Pat Martin: I'm wondering, though, how it was decided what spending should fall under vote 35 that needed this bridging. I'm interested in particular on page 81, under Natural Resources, where there is Atomic Energy, \$222 million for the Chalk River Laboratories CANDU reactor. It's very controversial. If that spending was planned to go ahead anyway, what would have been the reasoning, and who would have applied for this to be part of the fast-tracked, enabled spending? Who would have made the request?

Mr. Alister Smith: Everything that is in chapter 3 of the budget is eligible for the use of this Treasury Board vote 35.

Mr. Pat Martin: Except that not everything is. Who decided what would be under the special vote?

Mr. Alister Smith: There were some items ready to move in advance of supplementary estimates (A) for which funding could be provided through this vote. There are some where there are cash requirements that extend beyond supplementary estimates (A) and, on a bona fide cash requirements basis, would also be eligible for assistance from this vote.

Mr. Pat Martin: What would have been the goals or the benefit to having this particular spending fall under the rubric of vote 35? If it was scheduled and it was in the main budget anyway, how is it to anybody's benefit to speed that up when in fact it's a very controversial issue and may have benefited from more public debate and analysis?

Mr. Alister Smith: We're not really questioning the elements that are in the budget that are stimulus and that are to be accelerated, whether it's to provide a nuclear advantage for Canada and improve the competitiveness of the industry or for other reasons. I'm not really able to debate the policy here.

Mr. Pat Martin: No, not the merits of it, but I'm looking at the process. How did they get that in the group of things that would be under vote 35?

Mr. Alister Smith: Sure.

Brian.

Mr. Brian Pagan: Mr. Martin, perhaps I can try to explain the process.

The starting point for vote 35 consideration was that it clearly had to be part of Canada's economic action plan. It was clearly articulated in the budget. The budget met with the approval of the House, so therefore anything that was in the budget was a potential call on vote 35.

The next step was for departments to proceed with the policy approval at cabinet, where that was required, and then to develop the detailed terms and conditions that would satisfy Treasury Board ministers that a program, in whatever form it took, would be implemented in consideration of due diligence, transparency, and value for Canadians. We really are working with departments to move that along. To a certain extent, we are dependent on departments to finalize the terms and conditions and be able to bring them forward before they can be approved. So everything is

eligible, and to a certain extent, it is as they come forward. There has been no designation that this or that is the priority for vote 35. It's as they become available. That's the first point.

The second point—and this is very important—is to understand that when a budget initiative comes to us for approval, that does not automatically precipitate an allocation from vote 35, because we are looking at their cash forecasted requirements. If the initiative does not have a cash need before supply, then it simply comes into supplementary estimates, and there are approximately \$1.6 billion of budget initiatives that are in these supplementary estimates for which there is no tie or relationship to vote 35. Where a department can indicate that they can spend in a stimulative way in advance of supply, then we would look at vote 35.

•(1255)

Mr. Pat Martin: That answers my question. In a stimulative way, that is the test. In order to have this special consideration, you should be able to demonstrate that this will in fact be stimulative.

Mr. Brian Pagan: The budget in chapter 3, in its entirety, is intended to be stimulative. It's intended to support housing, infrastructure, Canada's sectoral competitiveness, and consumer confidence.

Mr. Pat Martin: It's a very tenuous connection in some of these items. That's all I'm saying, and I realize we're not arguing the merits of the choices with you. And I'm not trying to get into a debate, but as a member of Parliament looking at it, I think even with some of the western economic diversification money that you find on page 82, it would be hard, without knowing a lot more details.... If I had input into what kind of spending I'd like to see under western economic diversification, I don't think recreational infrastructure would be the top priority.

But that's helpful. So somebody has to advocate for and argue for the inclusion of certain elements under this special category. Again, process-wise, who would make the case? Would it be department heads?

Mr. Alister Smith: I'm not quite sure it's exactly that. As you alluded, we do not second-guess what's in the budget or whether these are stimulative or not or whether they're the right thing to do or not. Our role is to ensure that if indeed there are funding requirements they can be met appropriately, and in this case, vote 35 provides the bridge funding where there are genuine cash requirements that we can't meet through supplementary estimates (A), for instance, or supplementary estimates (B).

So that's really what it is. There's no additional money. There are no additional policy choices being made. It's really a mechanism to bridge fund.

Mr. Pat Martin: Yes, that makes me question whether it's worth our mulling over these things to this extent, to tell you the truth.

I have no other questions actually, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Colleagues, we're close to the top of the hour. We probably have a bit of flex time for a little bit more meeting, but colleagues often have commitments when we get to our planned expiry time and I can't push us very much beyond.

So I'll just look around the table and try to determine whether members would like to continue into another round or a few more questions or whether we can move to an adjournment.

Okay, then I'm going to raise two things. First of all, you have in front of you a motion dealing with the courtesy gift given to the visiting Pakistani delegation. If someone would move that, we'd deal with that. Mr. Warkentin moves the motion.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: The second thing is something I would have addressed had we had more time. Mr. Smith and Mr. Pagan have each—or at least Mr. Smith has—directed our attention to the fact that the real administrative responsibility for the execution of most of this spending here, in terms of accountability, falls to the deputy heads throughout the range of government. While Mr. Smith and Mr. Pagan have good descriptions of these, it would be almost impossible for them to be on top of each of these spending envelopes and to know whether the partner was participating, whether there was a partner, how many jobs had been created, whether money had actually moved into a cheque form or something.

So colleagues may want to consider inviting to one meeting a number of department heads, not for the whole meeting but only to answer questions about a particular project. There are dozens and dozens of projects. I was going to ask about the grant and contribution to the wharf at Digby, Nova Scotia, for example; that came up in questioning earlier. Members would probably have an interest in that, and the purpose would be to drill down and determine whether the federal stimulus money hit the road and where there was job creation, on a regional basis.

So I'm going to ask members to collaborate a little bit and consider a meeting where we would invite a number of these department heads to answer questions about a particular project for maybe 15 minutes each. We could have, for example, two department deputy heads per party. That would give us eight, and if we did it collaboratively we could probably do it. I know we have not yet itemized this as future business, but I'm suggesting this may be the only way our committee is going to actually see where the rubber hits the road.

I would also say we're probably the only committee in Parliament that can do it, given our cross-departmental mandate. So I'll throw it out there and leave it with members to collaborate a little bit and see if we can come up with a list.

Now I see members want to either address this or something related, so I'll turn to my left.

Ms. Hall Findlay.

• (1300)

Ms. Martha Hall Findlay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We certainly support that. I think it's an excellent idea. It is a challenge because we just received these.

If we do that, I would ask colleagues to review the supplementary estimates so we can provide input as quickly as possible to you and the clerk as to which departments we would like to come before us. We won't know that until we've had a chance to review, but we should do it quickly.

The Chair: Our next two meetings are on estimates and supplementary estimates, with Minister Toews on one day and Minister Paradis from Public Works on the other day.

Mr. Martin.

Mr. Pat Martin: I can't imagine how it will be fruitful to bring in the department heads to go after a specific local example of infrastructure. It's on par with bringing Ruby Dhalla before the immigration committee to study the issue of immigration with a specific example. I think it's wrong in terms of policy-making and will be fruitless. We don't have the expertise or the background knowledge on any specific project to comment on whether it's well done, worthwhile, has merit, or is meeting any kind of target.

We're getting into the kind of micromanagement you've cautioned about many times, Mr. Chair. I don't think it's a good way to go.

The Chair: Okay.

Are there any comments from the government side?

Mr. Warkentin.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: I think we would like to consult with the other parties on whether it's the general consensus of the committee that we move forward in this way, and try to have a meeting that is constructive and informative.

The Chair: Sure. Keep in mind Mr. Martin's comments, as we don't want to be seen as micromanagers here.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: And we would be opposed to bringing Ruby Dhalla before this committee.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Chair: Okay.

Have we finished our business for today? We're not meeting next week. We'll be in our constituencies. So we'll see you all a couple of weeks from now.

Thank you very much, Mr. Smith and Mr. Pagan, for your contributions today.

We're adjourned.

Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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